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ABSTRACT

While the Hill Interaction Matrix was developed as a research instrument to assess interview process, it is also generally useful in any undertaking requiring the evaluation of verbal interaction and, hence, can be used as an aid in modifying communication in order to increase its therapeutic effect. The Hill Interaction Matrix with accompanying directions is included. (Author/CK)

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Counseling Uses of the Hill Interaction Matrix

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The Hill Interaction Matrix was developed as a group therapy process measure. Hill, in his 1965 publication, specified the conditions of its development.[8] Instrument validity was based on discharge rates and "I feel better" statements. In later studies by Hill,[8] Seligman and Sterne,[15] Boyd,[2] and Bigelow and Thorne,[1] the instrument was used as an outcomes measure by adopting change in response pattern as the criteria. Although most of these studies indicated positive directionality of results, they lacked statistical significance. However, non-significance might have been a design phenomenon rather than a result of the non-sensitivity of the instrument.

Reports by Johnson,[12] and Hansen and Wirgau,[6] and a handbook by McCarty[13] indicate that the HIM can profitably be used to instruct others in interactional techniques. Such instruction in the HIM was viewed as establishing a set toward the analysis of interaction so that individuals could, in their communication, better recognize and understand the position of another.

From the above brief review of the literature, it can be noted that, over the years, the uses of the HIM have grown from process measure to outcomes measure to an instructional tool for facilitating interpersonal communication. How is this possible? What characteristics of the instrument allow it such flexibility of use? First, it presents a high degree of face validity. Therapists looking at this system of interaction analysis can readily identify the potentialities of the cell definitions and relate them to therapeutic dialogue. Second, the matrix permits the inclusion of almost all verbal statements presented in the interview. Third, the matrix is readily teachable. For example, McCarty's handbook was written for use with young adolescents to facilitate their interaction skills. Fourth, it focuses primarily on the communication process itself rather than relying only upon hypothetical constructs which must be inferred by the observer or participant.

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The Hill Interaction Matrix utilizes a 5x4 cell design with each row and column defined independently. This provides 20 cells, each presenting a combination of one row and one column definition. Each cell was weighted by Hill in terms of its therapeutic impact. Presumably, verbalizations in the high weight cells foster insight and behavior change. As a function of their value, they are also considered more threatening to the participants

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in the interaction. A perusal of Appendix A will indicate the names and definitions of the rows and columns of the matrix.

The clinical and training uses of the HIM fall into three areas:

1. Client assessment of the communication process
2. Counselor assessment of the communication process
3. Instructional technique for counselors-in-training

Client Assessment of the Communication Process

Johnson, in utilizing the HIM in marriage counseling,[12] reports that many marital conflicts are a result of the husband or wife misunderstanding the intent or quality of the thoughts expressed by the spouse. By utilizing the HIM, marriage partners can be taught to assess the level of communication expressed by their spouses. Thus, the individual is better able to respond in an appropriate manner. Further, if both husband and wife are familiar with the matrix, they have a common frame of reference from which to discuss unresolved problem areas. This technique raises to the level of consciousness an awareness that they are not talking about the same thing, have different needs, or are avoiding important family topics resulting in the non-resolution of family concerns.

Johnson utilizes the technique by instructing the marriage partners to analyze communication segments throughout the week and report back portions of satisfying and dissatisfying interactions at the next interview. He moves from assisting husband and wife in the resolution of communication conflict areas to encouraging them to analyze their conflict areas without the presence of a counselor. Johnson reports that the technique improves communication skills, reduces misunderstandings, and fosters a better marriage relationship.

Hansen and Wirgau[6] report utilizing the HIM as one technique in the resolution of racial difficulties experienced in a high school. A program they call Human Relations Training used small groups to foster understanding and acceptance. Group activities were divided into two sessions: theoretical and counseling. The HIM was presented to explain ways to communicate. While the material was presented in theory sessions, it was available to be drawn upon in the counseling sessions also. Initially, group observers fed back to the group data regarding the level of group interaction. Later, as the group progressed, members provided the feedback, leading to the discontinuance of the observer. Hence, the matrix highlighted areas of communication dissonance leading to interpersonal conflict and permitted increased understanding between group members.

Boyd has used the HIM in group counseling, as did Hansen and Wirgau, to assist group members in their understanding of the within-group communications process. He used three general techniques: one, a group observer whose job was to remind the group when productive topics were being dropped or when the group was not approaching the work area of the matrix with much consistency; two, group instruction in the matrix with the leader playing an instructive and confrontive role until the group becomes sophistocated enough to be self-analytical about its progress; three, the playback of selective segments of tape recordings.

Because all of the approaches required providing group members with at least minimal instruction in the HIM system and because at least some of the group members were usually willing to adopt task roles within the group, Boyd has found that the use of observers and recording devices are not necessary for the adoption of the technique. These more artificial means provide additional hurdles for the group to overcome. A simple handout with approximately an hour's instruction suffices to acquaint members with the theory and procedures necessary for putting the system to use. Once the group "ground rules" are laid, the instrument is presented. Following the presentation, the leader plays an active role until the group becomes self-analytical of its own interaction. This does not mean that all groups want to or will succeed in staying at a work level, but it does make them aware of their immediate behavior. It also brings to awareness the unwillingness of some group members to become involved at meaningful levels of interaction. Further, it provides the group with a vehicle for attempting to resolve the incongruence of such members' behaviors.

By providing an analytical framework, the system increases interpersonal sensitivity and fosters a group feedback process. This process was found by Meyers, et al. to foster accurate self-other perception.[14] It also appears to increase the speed with which a group approaches a therapeutic level of verbal interaction and its willingness to deal with significant problem areas.

Counselor Assessment of the Communication Process

The HIM provides a schematic for counselor use during the interview process. Self-reference to the system provides a framework within which the counselor may analyze the therapeutic value of interview content areas. Obviously, the HIM system does not allow everything occurring within the interview to be analyzed. Non-verbal communications--either physically related or non-audible intra-personal communications or tension level are not quantifiable on the matrix. However, general interaction content can be readily assessed

in terms of therapeutic value via use of the system. The typical counseling interview moves from low threat, or pre work, areas of the scale toward work areas as the interview progresses. Further, toward the conclusion of the interview, the counselor can expect the interaction level to approach the initial pre work area as the client prepares to conclude. This follows a pattern similar to that presented by Brammer and Shostrom in their analysis of the therapeutic interview.[3]

If interview progress does not follow this usual form, the counselor can begin reviewing potential reasons for such lack of movement. Perhaps the defenses of the client prevent or impede positive productive movement. Counselor reference to the HIM provides ready clues regarding client activity. Further, the information can be used to help the client deal with his defense system. Perhaps the counselor finds himself resisting such movement. Typically, the counselor tends to resist when topics deal with unresolved areas of his personal development or areas with which he cannot relate due to his inability to understand the dynamics of his client. Perhaps the counselor is unable to "stay with" the client, given the topic of concern. This is often found in counselors ill-trained in interview relationship techniques.

The use of the HIM, therefore, gives the counselor a ready check on the progress of the interview and an assessment of the communication closeness of the two parties within the interview.

Instructional Technique for Counselors-in-Training

Obviously, the foregoing discussion applies to counselors-in-training as well as practitioners. Presenting the HIM system to practicum students provides them with an initial method for analyzing their recorded interviews. While such a procedure is no substitute for modeled interviews, readings, or other experiences, it speeds recognition of important content, analysis of interview behavior, and most importantly develops student awareness of the importance of communication compatibility (that is, are counselor and client talking about the same thing with the same intensity?). Hountras and Redding adopted a similar approach using the Amsdon Verbal Interaction Scale.[9] Their results indicated that counselors sensitized to the interaction process allowed clients to express themselves more fully.

The HIM helps beginning counselors develop a self-critical attitude toward their work by providing a format for content analysis of audio tapes. Since the matrix provides an organized approach to interview analysis, the results are more widely generalizable than the usual interview-specific behavior of the traditional practicum session. The result is that counselors develop an applied understanding of counseling behavior more rapidly.

The use of the HIM in this manner requires instructing a practicum student regarding its dimensions and use before he begins interviewing. In practice, it takes two to three hours to familiarize a group of students sufficiently with the instrument so they can accurately use it themselves. This includes both an explanation of the system and initial practice on demonstration tapes. During review of their initial interviews, supervisor reference to the scale reinforces its use until the student has developed the ability to analyze his own interview.

The HIM provides the practicum student with a method of assessing directionality of the interviews, therapeutic impact, and client-counselor compatibility. The focus, then, is on some of the global issues in individual counseling. Because the HIM provides a frame of reference, the beginner is able to avoid some of the problems usually encountered. Further, because he has some preconceived framework, he is not dependent upon the problem approach to tape analysis usually utilized with first-practicum students. When practicum supervisors utilize a problem approach to interview content, they focus on the non-productive in that the learning climate is hampered by the threatening nature of negative comments. Further, as interview problems tend to be situation specific, such a procedure is only minimally productive when generalized to the broad range of clients the trainee will see in his professional practice. Obviously, non-productive interview behavior must be dealt with by the supervisor. However, when handled within the framework of an operationalized system, such behavior is more easily integrated into general learning.

Two lines of research indicate that the uses of the HIM discussed above are relevant. Ivey's attending behavior research indicates that the "good" counselor stays with topics introduced by the client rather than jumping from topic to topic and that he communicates an attitude of interest to the client.[10] Ivey reports that these counseling behaviors facilitate the communication process. A review of the three uses of the HIM proposed above indicate that the instrument should assist in client-client or counselor-client attending behavior, and, as such, foster better communication leading to increased therapeutic impact.

That the modification of within-interview behavior can be taught to participants has been shown by Carkhuff and others on numerous occasions. Carkhuff and Banks[4] and Carkhuff and Bierman[5] are two studies in point. Both reported significant change in the desired direction resulting in more positive relationships between two groups of people (black-white and parent-child). The research, therefore, indicates that the described uses of the HIM are, in fact, applicable to a wider array of interaction process analyses.

To conclude: While the Hill Interaction Matrix was developed as a research instrument to assess interview process, that same instrument is generally useful in any undertaking requiring the evaluation of verbal interaction and, hence, can be used as an aid in modifying communication in order to increase its therapeutic effect.

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The Hill Interaction Matrix

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The Hill Interaction Matrix is a system for categorizing conversation within a counseling session. It is useful in helping groups assess the degree to which they are dealing with therapeutic topics.

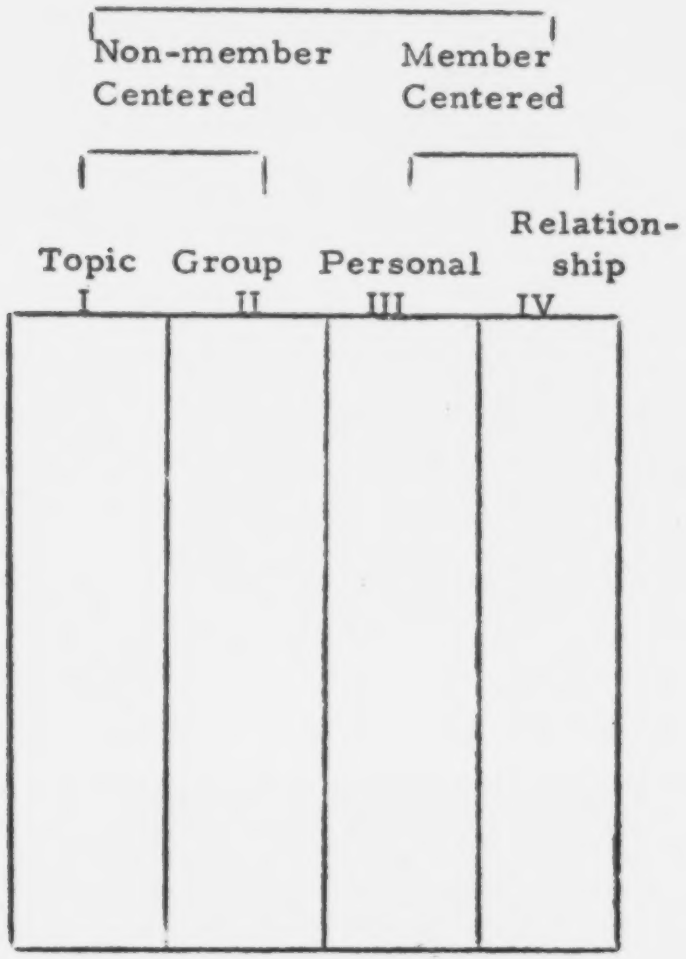
LEVELS OF RECEPTIVENESS		DISCUSSION TARGETS: Non-Member Centered — Topic I	Non-Member Centered — Group II	Member Centered — Personal III	Member Centered — Relationship IV
Closed to Information about Self	Responsive A	IA	IIA	IIIA	IVA
	Conventional B	IB (1)	IIB (2)	IIIB (9)	IVB (10)
	Assertive C	IC (3)	IIC (4)	IIIC (11)	IVC (12)
Open to Information about Self	Speculative D	ID (5)	IID (6)	IIID (13)	IVD (14)
	Confrontive E	IE (7)	IIE (8)	IIIE (15)	IVE (16)

The HIM is a combination of four columns and five rows, each having a mutually exclusive name and being inclusive of almost all verbal behavior. As you can see, these rows and columns can be grouped into broader areas, in the case of the columns, into conversation about or with group members or topics outside of the membership. The rows are combined into closed and open to receptiveness. Such receptiveness deals with the individual's willingness to receive information about himself.

Combining the rows and columns results in twenty cells, each bearing a title which is a combination of its row and column designation. Please note the number within each cell in four of the last five rows; that number indicates the therapeutic value of the conversation which can be assigned to it.

Now look at the heavy double lines. They divide the matrix into quadrants. By assessing the difference in cell weight, it is easy to see that conversation in some quadrants is more personally productive than in other quadrants. It is also more threatening and harder to deal with. A definition of the rows and columns follows.

DISCUSSION TARGETS



Non Member Centered

I. Topic: Conversation falling within the topic column includes any subject other than persons or relationships within the group. Examples are people outside the group, weather, or current events.

II. Group: Group conversation deals with group maintenance topics. Examples include when the group meets and what is wrong with the group. Talk centers on the group itself.

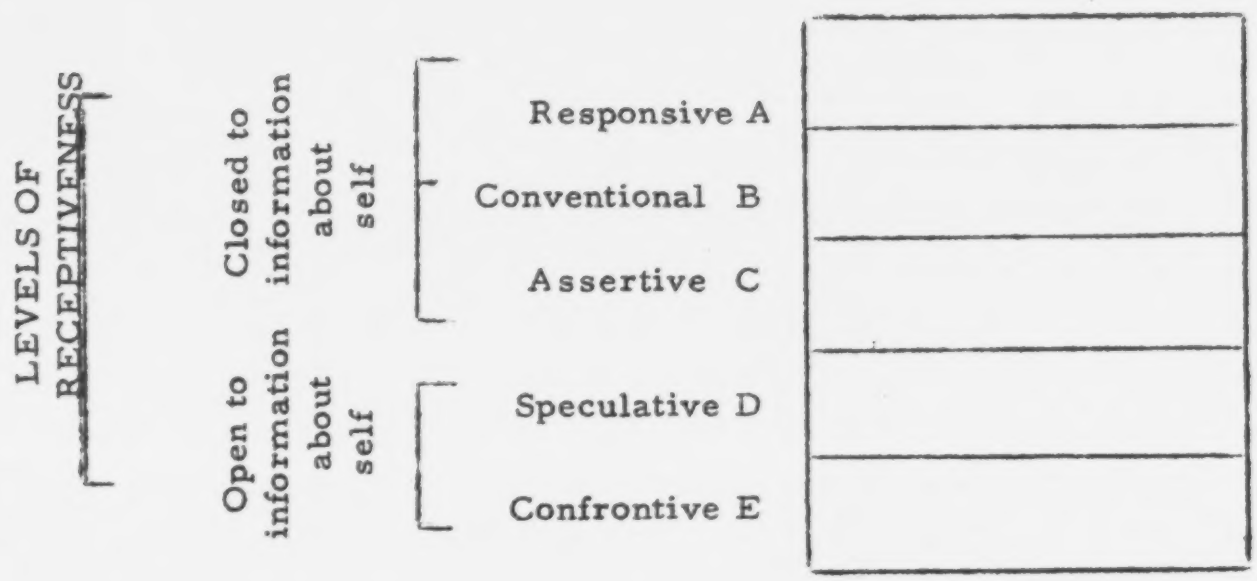
Member Centered

III. Personal: Personal conversation can be identified by the "I" or "you" nature of the statements. They deal with the personal actions or feelings of a group member and potentially the responses of others to that member's disclosure. "I think that my father dislikes me." "You don't think he wanted to have much to do with you, huh?" is a two-sided example of such an exchange.

IV. Relationship: Interview content labled relationship is all conversation between group members indicative of how they think or feel about each other. Examples are: "I think you're dumb" or "One of the reasons I like Bill is that we think alike."

Please note that as the conversation moves from non member centered to member centered the threat involved increases, likewise the potential value for members of the group if they are to profit from their group experience.

LEVELS OF RECEPTIVENESS



Closed

A. Responsive: Responsive conversation includes monosyllable communication, usually coaxed from the group member. Usually such responses are indicative of minimal levels of involvement in group activities.

B. Conventional: Communication characterized as conventional includes "small talk" or normal conversation. There is no problem in gathering the data.

C. Assertive: The assertive category typically deals with hostile, attacking, definitive statements which shut off discussion and hence limit the opportunity for personal growth. "You're crazy!" "I'm through!" are examples of such statements.

Open

D. Speculative: Speculative statements open two-way conversation. They can be directed toward oneself or another. They are often prefaced by "I think" or "It's possible." They then continue and present a high risk statement which allows the recipient and statement presentor a graceful escape if it is so desired. Examples: "Maybe I let my wife push me around too much." or "Is it possible that you let your husband walk over you?"

E. Confrontive: Confrontive statements vary from speculative in that the risk level is higher and the confronter is more willing to state his opinions in definitive terms. Such statements may be about himself or another group member. They require a great deal of honesty and openness. Further, they are characterized by an honest effort to help. "I (you) get pushed around by others all the time" is an example of such a statement. If the statements are not honestly helping, they are assertive rather than confrontive.

Note that with the rows, too, the threat level increases as we move down the rows (also the potential for helpful, open communication between group members.)

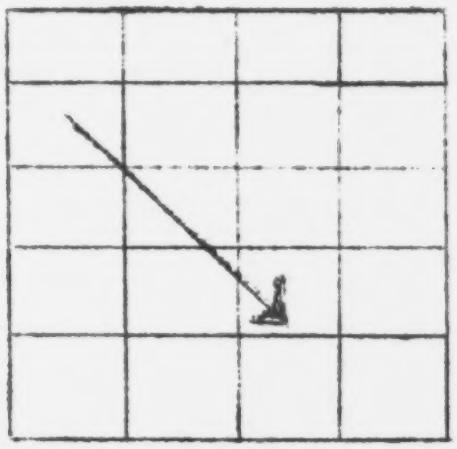
THERAPEUTIC VALUE

IA	IIA	IIIA	IVA
IB (1)	IIB (2)	IIIB (9)	IVB (10)
IC (3)	IIC (4)	IIIC (11)	IVC (12)
ID (5)	IID (6)	IIID (13)	IVD (14)
IE (7)	IIE (8)	IIIE (15)	IVE (16)

It is possible to analyze the therapeutic effectiveness of conversations by identifying the cell to which it is assigned. Each cell has been weighted for potential therapeutic value. Cells weighted "1" through "4" are considered "slightly helpful;" those weighted "5" through "8" are "somewhat helpful;" those weighted "9" through "12" are "more helpful," and finally those weighted "13" through "16" are "the most helpful." Note that those subdivisions correspond with the quadrants of the matrix. They clearly indicate that speculative and confrontive statements of a personal or relationship nature are potentially the most productive for personal growth. Sometimes this quadrant is called the group target area.

We can't expect all our conversation to be in that area. We can hope, of course, that it will reach that level at times within our sessions. They will be more productive if conversation of this nature does occur.

Conversation usually flows:



as the session begins. Hopefully, it will remain in the target area during a portion of the session. Near the end of a session, conversation flow usually reverses itself. The more open the group, the more willing the members are to deal with threatening topics; the more concerned they are with the resolution of personal problems, the longer they will stay in the target area. As the number of sessions increases we can expect the group to approach the target area faster and stay with it longer. We know, however, that we can't work hard all the time so we will probably find ourselves moving into and out of the target area at various times within any given session.

Let's think about where we are in the matrix as the group progresses. In addition to this "How are we doing?" procedure, the matrix serves another purpose.

Staying with Productive (high weight) Topics

Sometimes group members find it difficult to stay on a topic. They may find it difficult to deal with personally sensitive topics. They may try to avoid discussing them by introducing material of a less sensitive nature. Sometimes what they say is interesting, but not productive. At other times, group members may switch topics because the topic is not personally productive for them, they weren't listening closely, or they feel the group is not close enough to deal with such topics. The group can profit from this if other members of the group raise the action to group awareness so that the issues involved can be resolved. Such resolution will foster group productivity and help draw the group together.

Now we'll practice to see if you can operationalize the column and row definitions.

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